

Message Text

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11

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 AID-20 OMB-01 TRSE-00

ACDA-19 SAB-01 SAM-01 EB-11 FEA-02 SCI-06 PC-04 AGR-20

COME-00 DLOS-06 COA-02 INT-08 CU-04 DRC-01 (ISO) W

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P R 291710Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4975

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

CONSUL JERUSALEM 0086

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USINT DAMASCUS

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BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, TS

SUBJECT: COMMENTARY ON ARAB LEAGUE FOREIGN MINISTERS
CONFERENCE

REF: TUNIS 1834

1. SUMMARY ARAB LEAGUE FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE IN
TUNIS ACHIEVED LITTLE OF SIGNIFICANCE BUT DELEGATIONS

APPEARED TO HAVE COME AWAY RELATIVELY SATISFIED. FABRIC OF

ARAB "UNITY" WAS PRESERVED, WITH SESSIONS HAVING BEEN
CONDUCTED IN REMARKABLY MODERATE AND DIGNIFIED MOOD.
SYRIAN FORMER KHADDAN'S LETTING OFF STEAM ON FIRST DAY
OFFERED SYRIANS OPPORTUNITY TO RECORD THEIR POINT OF VIEW,
AND FROM THEN ON SESSIONS AVOIDED POLEMICS. EGYPTIANS,
DESPITE SOME EARLY EVIDENT CONCERN THAT SYRIANS MIGHT BE
UPSETTING THEIR APPLE CART, LEFT WITHOUT ANY VISIBILE EROSION
OF THEIR POLICY AND PERHAPS A FEELING OF TACIT SUPPORT.
SEVERAL IMPORTANT AGENDA ITEMS WERE LEFT FOR FURTHER
DISCUSSION, INCLUDING ARAB-EUROPEAN DIALOGUE, AS SESSION

RE RAW MATERIAL, AND DISCUSSION ON LAW OF SEA. END
SUMMARY.

2. ARAB LEAGUE FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE IN TUNIS
CAME UP WITH NO SURPRISES. PREDICTABLY, THERE WAS USUAL
AMOUNT OF PALAVER, WITH LITTLE OF SIGNIFICANCE BEING
ACHIEVED. CONFERENCE PROBABLY WELL SUMMARIZED BY TOP
JORDANIAN DELEGATE ABDUL MINEM AL-RIFAI, WHO TOLD ME:
"PRINCIPLES WERE DISCUSSED BUT NOTHING CRUCIAL WAS DECIDED".
ON OTHER HAND, ONE DELEGATE (MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR BENHIMA)
EXPRESSED VIEW THAT CONFERENCE MARKED IMPORTANT DEPARTURE
FOR PREVIOUS ARAB LEAGUE SESSIONS BY VIRTUE OF ITS MORE
RESPONSIBLE, MODERATE AND DIGNIFIED MOOD. IN BENHIMA'S
VIEW, DELEGATES ACTED WITH UNACCUSTOMED MATURITY, AND FOR
A CHANGE THERE WERE NO BLOCS PITTED AGAINST EACH OTHER.
WHILE SYRIAN FORMER KHADDAN LET OFF STEAM ON FIRST DAY--
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CRITICIZING END OF OIL EMBARGO AND EGYPTIAN ACCEPTANCE OF
DISENGAGEMENT BEFORE DISENGAGEMENT ACHIEVED ON SYRIAN
FRONT -- OTHER DELEGATES SOON SUCCEEDED IN PERSUADING
SYRIANS TO CALM DOWN AND FURTHER SESSIONS WERE EVIDENTLY
DEVOID OF POLEMICS.

3. SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF CONFERENCE TIME WAS SPENT
DISCUSSING MILITARY SITUATION ON SYRIAN FRONT AND TIMING

OF NEXT ARAB SUMMIT. RE FORMER, DESPITE ALARMIST REPORTS BY FOREIGN PESSIMISTS, INCLUDING MEMBERS AMERICAN PRESS, IT NOT RPT NOT OUR IMPRESSION THAT SYRIANS TOOK PARTICULARLY EXTREME POSITION. SEEN IN PERSPECTIVE OF SYRIAN HARD-LINE POLICY OF SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, KHADDAM'S ASSERTION THAT THERE CAN BE NO GOLAN DISENGAGEMENT "DETACHED FROM THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION" OR THAT ISRAEL MUST COMMIT ITSELF TO FULL WITHDRAWAL AS PRECONDITION FOR FIRST STEP IN DISENGAGEMENT SEEMS RELATIVELY MILD. IN OUR VIEW, HIS STATEMENT SHOULD BE VIEWED IN CONTEXT OF: (A) RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER GOLDA MEIR REFUSING TO GIVE UP ANY PART OF GOLAN; (B) TYPE OF AUDIENCE BEFORE WHICH KHADDAM APPEARING; AND (C) ARAB PROPENSITY OF ORAL HYPERBOLE. SENIOR MEMBER OF LEBANESE DELEGATION TOLD ME THAT IN HIS VIEW SYRIANS CONTINUED TO SHOW "GOODWILL" REGARDING THEIR COMMITMENT TO DISENGAGEMENT EFFORT AND ULTIMATE PEACE WITH ISRAEL.

4. FACT THAT DISAGREEMENT OVER TIMING OF NEXT ARAB SUMMIT ENDED IN COMPROMISE CONSIDERED FAVORABLE SIG., DECISION ALLOWING SYRIANS TO CONVOKE SUMMIT BEFORE SEPTEMBER WAS OBVIOUSLY SOP TO SYRIAN POSITION AT TIME SYRIANS FIGHTING "ON FRONT LINES", BUT CLEARLY OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES HAVE OPTION OF REFUSING TO GO ALONG.

5. ALTHOUGH CONFERENCE DEVOTED WHOLE DAY TO ARAB-AFRICAN COOPERATION, ONLY DECISION TO EMERGE WAS ANNOUNCEMENT OF ADDITIONAL SAUDI CONTRIBUTION OF \$25 MILLION TO BANK FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT, AS WELL AS CONTRIBUTIONS OF UAE. NO DECISION WAS TAKEN REGARDING SEAT OF BANK, WITH ALGERIA, TUNISIA AND SUDAN ALL PUSHING THEIR OWN CANDIDACIES. INFORMED SOURCE TELLS US THAT SUDAN AS SITE HAS BEEN RULED OUT AND THAT IN ALL LIKELIHOOD ALGIERS WILL BE FINALLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SELECTED.

6. IN SPITE OF THEIR INCLUSION AMONG MAIN SUBJECTS ON ORIGINAL AGENDA (PARA 2, TUNIS 1646), LITTLE TIME WAS SPENT NOR WERE DECISIONS MADE EITHER ON ARAB-EUROPEAN RELATIONS OR ON SPECIAL UN SESSION. ACCORDING TO SOURCE WHO ATTENDED SESSIONS, IT WAS CONSIDERED PREMATURE TO AGREE ON RECOMMENDED SHAPE OF ARAB-EUROPEAN RELATIONS IN VIEW OF DIVERGENT APPROACHES TO PROBLEM BASED ON HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES AMONG ARAB STATES. FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAVE LONG HISTORY OF ASSOCIATION WITH EUROPE AND, THEREFORE, INTEREST IN DEFINING A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP, OTHER ARAB STATES, SUCH AS THOSE IN GULF AREA, CARE LESS ABOUT DEVELOPING SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE.

7. DISCUSSION ON SPECIAL UN SESSION RE RAW MATERIALS, TOGETHER WITH DISCUSSION ON LAW OF SEA, WAS DEFERRED UNTIL TECHNICAL COMMITTEES HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE DETAILED STUDY. AS MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR TOLD ME, "WE DECIDED DELEGATES TO THIS CONFERENCE WERE NOT RPT NOT TECHNICALLY QUALIFIED TO DISCUSS THESE MATTERS IN DEPTH."

8. DESPITE FONMIN CHATTI'S ASSERTION IN HIS CLOSING REMARKS THAT DELEGATIONS WITHOUT EXCEPTION HAD AGREED THAT THE PLO SHOULD SPEAK FOR ALL PALESTINIANS, AL-RIFAI TOLD ME THIS NOT RPT NOT TRUE. HE SAID JORDANIANS HAD NOT RPT NOT EXPRESSED RECOGNITION OF PLO.

9. OUR GUESS WOULD BE THAT EVERYONE CAME AWAY FROM CONFERENCE RELATIVELY SATISFIED. FABRIC OF ARAB "UNITY" WAS PRESERVED, WITH ARAB NATIONS AGREEING TO SEEK WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTING DECISIONS TAKEN AT ALGIERS LAST NOVEMBER. SYRIANS HAD OPPORTUNITY TO RECORD THEIR POINT OF VIEW AND LEFT WITH ZENDORSEMENT" OF THEIR POSITION ON DISENGAGEMENT. EGYPTIANS, DESPITE SOME EARLY EVIDENT CONCERN THAT SYRIANS MIGHT BE UPSETTING THEIR APPLE CART, LEFT WITHOUT ANY VISIBLE EROSION OF THEIR POLICY AND PERHAPS WITH A FEELING OF TACIT SUPPORT. IF THERE WERE REAL DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WITH SYRAISN, THEY WERE PRETTY MUCH PAPERED OVER. TUNISIANS WERE JUST HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HOSTS AND TO SWIM IN MAINSTREAM FOR A WHILE. IF IMPORTANT PRE-CONFERENCE AGENDA ITEMS (ARAB-EUORPEAN RELATIONS AND UNGA SPECIAL SESSION) RECEIVED ONLY PASSING REATMENT, AT LEAST PARTICIPANTS AVOIDED CONFLICT AND LEFT THEM FOR ANOTHER DAY.
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